

ST. JUDE inspire



SUMMER 2025

Lessons in Resilience

St. Jude cancer survivor Holly supports students in the same community that supported her.



Drumming up hope

Cancer survivor Adam inspires others through music

Molecular level

St. Jude works to understand the mechanisms of childhood diseases

Giving back

Once a patient, Tori now helps other St. Jude kids



Support for St. Jude

St. Jude patient Ashtyn was showered with love from longtime St. Jude partner Signet Jewelers as she celebrated five years of clear scans after being treated for a cancerous brain tumor. She described the experience as the best day ever.

Signet, whose brands include KAY® Jewelers, ZALES, Jared® and Banter™ by Piercing Pagoda, has raised more than \$100 million for St. Jude since becoming an official partner more than 26 years ago. In October of 2023, Signet announced a new \$100 million commitment. The impact of Signet's close partnership is felt throughout St. Jude, from patient registration areas to the beloved KAY Kafe to the research that is accelerating progress toward cures.

Signet recently announced that it raised a record-breaking \$10 million in 2024, representing the company's largest single-year fundraising total ever. This goes towards the new \$100 million commitment, which will help survivors like Ashtyn through ongoing research and care in the After Completion of Therapy Clinic and St. Jude LIFE Study Program.





St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® is home to thousands of stories. While many are heartbreaking, so many more are uplifting and hopeful.

Many of them begin with four devastating words: Your child has cancer.

Thanks in part to research and treatments developed at St. Jude over 63 years, we're rewriting those stories with a new beginning – one that starts with survival.

In this issue of St. Jude Inspire, we focus on survivorship and what it means for our patients to not just survive, but to thrive.

You'll read about Holly, who was treated at St. Jude for Ewing sarcoma, bone cancer, as a 12-year-old. She underwent chemotherapy and then radiation treatment and said she thought her diagnosis was the end.

But Holly survived and today impacts her community by supporting a local shelter for the unhoused and as a teacher where she's created a nurturing, comfortable classroom for her students.

Holly said she and her family found "grace and kindness" at St. Jude.

They're not the only ones, either. Archie and Tori both reflect in these pages on the care they received at St. Jude and how it helped heal them then and affects them still.

Archie said, "At the lowest time in my life, I found the best moments at St. Jude."

Today, he follows in his father's footsteps as an EMT and firefighter, putting himself on the front lines to save lives.

Tori is a St. Jude child life specialist, working for the very institution that saved her life. She carries with her the fatigue and pain of treatment; it inspires her to support and counsel not only patients, but their parents and siblings as well.

She calls this her "dream job" and I can't think of a more fulfilling, worthwhile dream.

Holly's mom kept a journal during treatment, and it ends with six hopeful words – "We are done. We are free."

But it was just the beginning. The start of a full, rich life of experiences and giving back and realizing dreams.

Thank you for your support of those dreams, and for all you do for the patients and families – and future teachers, firefighters and caregivers – of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

Ike Anand
Interim Chief Executive Officer, ALSAC

ST. JUDE
inspire

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You can help ensure families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food – so they can focus on helping their child live. Donate today at stjude.org/ImpactGiving



Grateful Hearts

When Vietnam was diagnosed with a brain tumor, his family found hope and support at St. Jude.

By **Linda A. Moore** - ALSAC

As Viet spoke about the start of his son's ongoing health journey, his wife's gaze moved from his face to a place far off in the distance.

Quynh Anh quietly relived the days in 2016 when their 6-year-old son, Vietnam, was sick and doctors didn't have answers. After a CT scan revealed a tumor in the pituitary area, Vietnam was diagnosed with craniopharyngioma, a rare benign brain tumor.

It is impossible to revisit those days without tears.

Cat Tien, Vietnam's second oldest sister, remembers too, days of worry, uncertainty and fear. She was in middle school back then. When she and her sisters visited Vietnam in the hospital, a doctor explained that Vietnam had a brain tumor.

"That was the shocking part for me and my siblings. We didn't know

what that meant," Cat Tien said. "Our grandfather had cancer, but he was well into his elder years. We'd never seen sickness like this in children, let alone our little brother."

But everything changed when Vietnam was referred to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®.

"He was just 6 years old, in first grade when he was diagnosed. It was so scary. We thought that we'd lost him," Viet said.

Vietnam was their baby, the youngest of five children and the only boy. They were grateful he was going to St. Jude.

"We were so happy," Viet said. "I saw everything St. Jude did for children that have brain tumors."

After arriving, he also learned that St. Jude would not send them a bill. Families never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food.

"It was amazing when we came to St. Jude," Viet said. "It really surprised

us. It's a very special place. Every person in the hospital is very nice. And they have a love for my son, for my family."

“
I think our family has endless gratitude for St. Jude. We're so lucky and fortunate.

- **Cat Tien**, Vietnam's sister

Initially, Vietnam was at St. Jude for three months. His treatment included surgery and radiation.

Vietnam doesn't remember a lot from when he was 6.

"My family tells me stories and it's like 'That happened?'" he said.

The way he spoke about his illness back then was "outlandish," his sister said.

"How is a child thinking these words? But he would say things like 'Oh, this is a journey' or 'I'm going on an adventure,'" she said. "Who thinks like that?"

A 2022 check-up at St. Jude showed the formation of a new cyst, which had grown by his 2023 scan.

He had surgeries in March and April and spent a few weeks in the

hospital. Now, Vietnam is 16 and back at home in Texas enjoying life as a high school student.

"He's grown up. Now he's tall, taller than me," Viet said with a chuckle. "We're so happy."

Cat Tien, 23, remembers how happy the family was when Vietnam was born.

"I was obsessed with him. He was so cute," she said.

She'd follow him around with her electronic tablet documenting his every move, even when he got old enough to tell her to stop.

"After he got sick, we were with him all the time," Cat Tien said.

Vietnam spends his free time playing online video games with friends. In school, his favorite classes are physics and aquatic science.

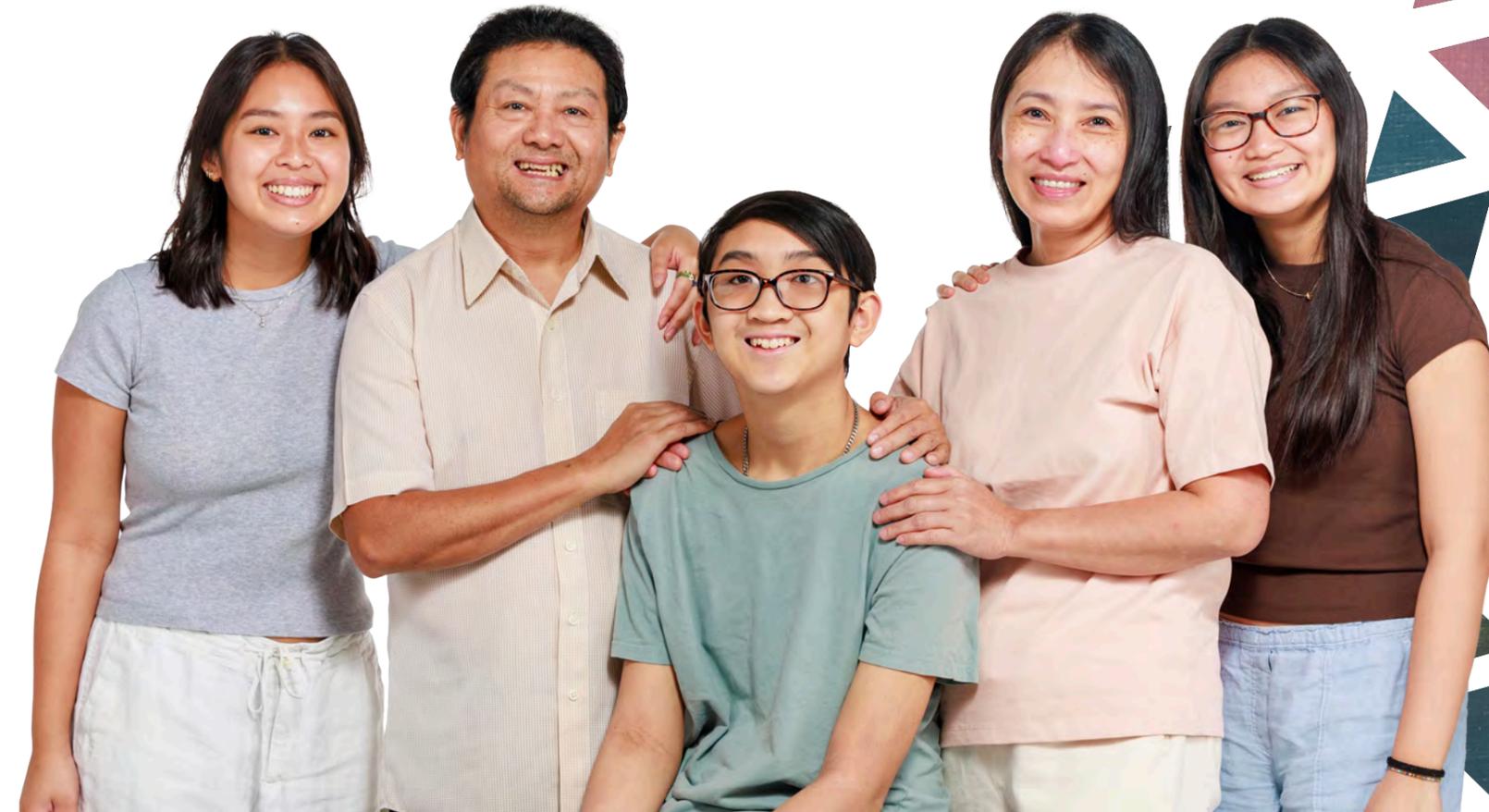
"I like science. I really like animals, and I think the ocean is really cool," Vietnam said. "So, it just kind of goes together. And the teacher's nice."

His family is grateful to the donors who support the St. Jude mission. "I think our family has endless gratitude for St. Jude. We're so lucky and fortunate," Cat Tien said.

St. Jude is "1,000%" why Cat Tien is in medical school today.

"It shaped every part of my career trajectory," she said.

St. Jude patient Vietnam (center) is pictured with his family, (from left) sister Cat Tien, dad Viet, mom Quynh Anh and sister Sophia. Art inspired by sibling of St. Jude patient Vietnam.



HOLLY'S HAVEN

From overcoming cancer to inspiring young minds,
St. Jude cancer survivor creates a safe space for students.

By **Geoffrey Redick** - ALSAC

Holly Bugos' classroom makes you wish you were a fourth grader again.

Warm colors and silly posters cover the walls, and lamps offer a break from the harsh overhead lights. You can sit at a desk if you want to be proper, or you can flop down on a bean bag chair or bounce on a yoga ball.

And you can stretch out, get comfortable and grab a good book – Holly has a bunch of them. She teaches literacy. She figures her students will keep reading if they're laughing. So, she shares books that make her laugh. Collections of Shel Silverstein poems and the chapter book *Sideways Stories From Wayside School*. "That one is a favorite," she said. "And if those are the kind of stories that got me into reading, that's what I like to share with my kids. Maybe they'll fall in love with reading."

Holly creates an escape from the outside world. In her classroom, it's OK for little people to have big feelings. You can tell her you're upset because you woke up late and your mom yelled at you. Or that you're hungry because you forgot a snack.

"This is our safe space," Holly said. "Everybody has emotions here. We're all going through different things, and it's OK just to be. In this big, scary world, we all need a little grace and kindness."

Holly's classroom isn't just a place you get to go – it's a place where you belong. That's true for her students and for herself. She teaches at a small school in a small town in Arkansas. It's the town she grew up in, and it's the school she attended, from kindergarten all the way through 12th grade.



Some of the parents of her students were her classmates. And some of her colleagues were her teachers. She likes how secure that feels. “Y’all made me who I am,” she tells them. “Now here I get to teach alongside of you.”

Joey Carr was one of those teachers. He was Holly’s basketball coach, too. And by the time she grew up and became a teacher, he had become principal of her school. When they had an opening, the decision to hire Holly was “automatic,” he said. “I knew she had a compassionate heart.”

He knew her character from seeing her in the classroom and on the court. He knew her strength from witnessing her beat cancer.

Things were serious

In 2002, when Holly was 12, a nagging pain crept into her left leg. At first, it didn’t raise alarms. But when she stopped climbing the bleachers for a good seat at her older sister’s basketball games, Holly’s mom knew something was wrong.

What followed was a series of doctor’s appointments. Maybe it was a strained ligament. Pain medicine only made things worse. Then there



You’re so happy that you’ve beat cancer. But then you walk out, and you’re like, ‘Oh, wait a minute. That was my family. That’s my second home. I love that place.’

– Holly, St. Jude cancer survivor

were X-rays, and a trip to a specialist in Memphis, Tennessee.

When Holly walked into the waiting room at that doctor’s office and saw her aunt from Virginia Beach, she knew things were serious. And when the doctor referred her to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital®, she knew that meant she had cancer.

“I thought that was the end for me,” she said.

Walking into St. Jude was overwhelming, but not in the way she thought it would be. “They’re like, ‘Hello, welcome!’ And that first time, they just came right up to us, gathered us, took us in,” she said.

She felt confused – her eyes weren’t seeing her expectations. “You don’t walk into a waiting room with those white walls. It’s just full of color.”

She felt the first glimmers of hope. Maybe it wasn’t the end for her. “There are kids on tricycles and riding around in wagons. And they don’t have any hair, but they don’t look sick. Everybody’s happy.”

The same day she arrived at St. Jude, Holly got a diagnosis: Ewing sarcoma, a cancerous tumor that starts in the bone. She also got a treatment plan: a year of chemotherapy plus two months of radiotherapy.

Word spread in her hometown, and people jumped into action. Carr, who retired from the school in 2023, organized “Hoops for Holly,” a free throw shoot-a-thon. The fire department sponsored a car wash with the local chapter of ESA, Epsilon Sigma Alpha, an international service organization that supports St. Jude. All of this support helps ensure that patients never receive a bill from St. Jude for treatment, travel, housing or food.

St. Jude community

Holly’s family needed the whole community. Treatment was something they all experienced. It was happening to her body, but her whole family was affected. They lived an hour away from Memphis, so they decided to come home as often as possible. She’d spend five days at St. Jude getting chemotherapy, drive home for a week to recover. Return to St. Jude for three more



days of chemo and home again for another week, and on and on.

With each trip, her connection to the community at St. Jude bound itself a little tighter. Everyone she met offered grace and kindness. Cooks at Kay Kafe who made whatever she wanted when her appetite vanished. Nurses who helped with homework. Other patients who became her friends. They all understood what she was going through.

Meanwhile, Holly’s friends at home were changing in ways she envied, taking up mascara wands and curling irons. “They were getting to go to dances, and they were getting to do their hair and makeup,” she said. “And even though I was trying to come back as much as I could, it was still just a whole other world.”

Holly’s mom was in that other world with her, by her side every step of

the way. She kept a journal of their time in treatment. Dozens and dozens of pages, marking the days with medical terminology and inner thoughts. And then in May of 2003, the final words: “We are done. We are free.”

For Holly, relief and happiness mixed with longing.

“You’re so happy that you’ve beat cancer. But then you walk out, and you’re like, ‘Oh, wait a minute. That was my family. That’s my second home,’” she said. “I love that place. I love those people. I don’t want to lose that.”

But like Holly’s classroom, St. Jude is more than a place. It’s a feeling you carry with you, even after you leave.

When Holly was finished with treatment, she returned to her hometown, changed in a way that

others could see. “Her struggle with cancer did not slow her down,” Carr said. “It was almost like it gave her more determination to live life to its fullest.”

That’s still true today, more than two decades after she completed treatment.

Anyone who’s taught school will tell you it’s more than a full-time job. Holly also volunteers with the local ESA chapter that helped her family all those years ago. She even spent a term as president. She made sure all the events that supported St. Jude that year were big and successful, but she also wanted to support their local homeless shelter with time and donations. “I say that the community really poured into me,” she said. “And what ESA has allowed me to do is pour back into this community.”

At school, Holly sometimes gets to step away from her day-to-day lessons to reflect on the lasting impact she can have. Recently, a couple of former students got in touch with her. They’re adults now, but they still think of her. One thanked her for bringing joy into the classroom at Christmas time. The other wanted to tell Holly that she’d just become a mother.

“This is why I want to create that atmosphere with my students, because I want them to always know that they can come to me with happy or sad things,” she said. “I will always be here for them.”



Your gift helps allow St. Jude cancer survivors like Holly live to inspire others. Make life your legacy. stjude.org/ImpactGiving





DRUMMING UP

H O P E

After surviving childhood cancer, Adam found his rhythm. Now he helps his students discover theirs.

By **Betsy Taylor** - ALSAC

Adam Hopper's right arm is shorter than his left. Most people don't notice. They don't know about the cancer that gnawed at his Kentucky childhood or the titanium prosthetic that stands in for bone in his upper right arm. They don't know he's a bone cancer survivor, treated at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® when he was 9.

"It'd be like talking about your kneecap," Adam said. "It never comes up."

Adam's story isn't about what he's missing, but what he's made of. He's attacked drumming – and life – with a fervor that makes the story of his right arm almost irrelevant.

"He's never used cancer as an excuse," his mom, Jane, said with pride, because this was how she raised him.

Yet, the 39-year-old makes it a point to share his cancer story with his music students.

"There's a lot of fragility in the mind space of kids," Adam said. "Maybe they can glean some connection from my story to challenges they may have to overcome."

Students share with him their own stories – stiff shoulders from car wrecks, childhood illnesses, tough home lives. Sometimes, they want to chat about what's for lunch.

"He has a way of connecting," Jane said. "There are kids who gravitate toward his strength, and he picks them up where they need encouragement and focus."

It's a reflection of how Jane and Adam's dad, Tim, raised him – and how St. Jude supported their

family – with high expectations and unwavering support.

If a guy like Adam, "with an arm and a half," as he puts it, can be a great drummer, what can't his students do if they work hard?

"You see this man who had such a life-altering event happen to him at such a young age, but he didn't let it stop him," Noah Allen, a former student, said. "He used it to motivate us."

If Adam can do it, they can do it, too.

A shot

Before Adam wielded his first drumsticks – and before cancer – life had a different rhythm. The thump, thump, thump of basketball. To be a Kentucky boy in 1995 was to be a Wildcats fan, to feel the electric hum of possibility, as if proximity to all that college basketball greatness – Tony Delk, Walter McCarty, Antoine Walker – could somehow make him great, too.

“I would wake up. Ball. Go to bed. Ball. Ball. That was me,” Adam said.

Adam can still hear the rhythm of it all: the squeak of sneakers, the coach’s shouts, the swish of the net, the roar of the crowd.

He can still remember the feel of the terrible ache in his upper right arm.

He ignored it at first. Yet, the pain persisted, creeping into his dreams and making it hard to sleep.

Adam’s dad took him to the doctor, where an orthopedic surgeon who saw Adam’s X-ray referred him for a biopsy. It was more than an ache – it was bone cancer.

“Our world went from a small family going to work, going to church, to all of a sudden, we were hit with this,” Tim said.

Adam was referred to St. Jude, which confirmed a diagnosis of Ewing sarcoma. He was treated on a St. Jude clinical trial protocol that was investigating whether increased intensity of chemotherapy could improve survival rates for patients with Ewing sarcoma. Adam’s treatment also included a limb-sparing surgery that “gave me a shot at saving my arm,” Adam said.

Staying strong

Adam woke up in bed at St. Jude. He moved slowly, pulling on clothes for a day of chemotherapy. The treatment would target his cancer cells but sap his strength, making simple movements feel monumental.

His parents had a rule: no lounging in pajamas all day. It was part of their commitment to his treatment, a full-time family job for the next year.

“
**Eighty percent
of my life is based
around things
St. Jude made
possible.**

– Adam, St. Jude
cancer survivor

“They were there, encouraging and supporting, but they weren’t enablers,” said Dennis Wheeler, Adam’s childhood drum teacher and a close family friend.

Adam’s parents included him in decisions about his care. “Adam would have been upset if we’d

kept secrets,” Jane said. When his weight dropped and his doctor discussed a feeding tube, Adam tried harder to eat.

“It was probably motivating,” Jane said.

Just after his 10th birthday in September 1995, Adam underwent limb-sparing surgery. The surgeon removed his deltoid and right humerus and replaced the bone with a titanium prosthesis.

Chemotherapy continued.

“Adam would be so weak he couldn’t get into the building,” Tim said. His face, even his lips, were white. “But as soon as St. Jude put blood and platelets in, it was like a flower that was about to die, and you would give it water and it would come back to life.”

Despite everything, Adam found excuses to laugh. Because that’s how Adam is.

“It’s a tough one to be like: ‘We gotta wake up with this and be sad every day?’ So, we just put on a good face and keep truckin’.”

Hard work

Adam’s grandfather had been a band director, his mom played clarinet, and his dad was a trumpeter. But Adam wanted to play drums.

“I don’t care who you are, drums are cool,” Adam said.

By the time he completed cancer treatment, fifth grade was over, and he was a year behind his peers in band. That didn’t deter Adam. That summer, Adam met Wheeler at church each week for private drum lessons.

“I was pretty good at it naturally,” Adam said, despite the rod in

his right arm. He practiced with the intensity he’d once given to basketball.

“When we saw we might need to adapt or get better, he dealt with it. We worked,” Wheeler said.

By high school, Adam was playing out of Wheeler’s college music book.

Adam’s small-town high school had no marching band, no football team. Yet, Adam’s ingenuity shone. With no set of timpani to practice on at school, he turned to unconventional tools at home – even books and piles of clothes – to get the sounds he needed.

Reflecting on when Adam first got to college on a drumming scholarship, Tim said, “I think he slept in the music room in college, he was so far behind.”

Jane and Tim witnessed Adam’s transformation at his junior recital, where he performed complex percussion solos on marimba, vibraphone and drum set.

“I couldn’t believe how far he’d come,” Tim said.

Butterfly effect

Today, Adam is a composer and performer, a band director and teacher.

“I’ve played a lot of music for having an arm and a half,” Adam joked.

“Eighty percent of my life is based around things St. Jude made possible. I met my wife, Sarah, in college. I went to that college because I got a scholarship to play drums. I wouldn’t have played drums if I didn’t have the opportunity to go to St. Jude,” Adam said.



St. Jude patient Adam seen during treatment in 1995

“We adopted our son, Jack, from Thailand in 2019. So, you could play the butterfly effect game for anything. But that sort of trajectory that ended up being the rest of my life started with going to St. Jude.”

Having been given a second chance at life, Adam has dedicated himself to helping his students make the most of their own lives.

“He’s a great leader, a beyond-amazing instructor, and he pushed us in a way that made us want to be better for ourselves,” Allen said.



Your support helps ensure patients like Adam can go on to help others. Make life your legacy.
stjude.org/ImpactGiving



SURVIVOR AND HERO

St. Jude saved his life, and now Archie saves others as a firefighter.

By **Betsy Taylor** - ALSAC

In Rockdale County, Georgia, where the scent of blackened fish mingles with the hum of daily life at the fire station, you'll find Archie Collins. At 24, Archie walks these halls as a firefighter and EMT – a role he never expected to embrace. His journey began years ago, influenced by his father, who is a dedicated Memphis firefighter, and a life-threatening illness.

Archie's life changed when he was diagnosed with cancer at just 11 years old and was referred to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®. His grandmother, Sybil Young, said "Cancer made him better," explaining that his St. Jude experience honed his best qualities, or "grew what was good," as she puts it. It focused him and set him on his path.

Collapse

The 11-year-old stood on his mark at the track meet. It was June 2012 in Memphis, Tennessee, and all the boys were sweaty. But Archie's clamminess felt different to him, like

something was wrong inside. The race started, and Archie ran hard – until dizziness took over. The ground surged toward him, and everything went black.

Healthwise, Archie hadn't felt right for a while. He had a strange growth under his jaw – "a big, golf ball-sized lymph node," as he described it. And he had no energy. His family had taken him to multiple hospitals, but the cause of his swollen lymph node remained a mystery.

"So, we just kept going on," Archie said. Until he collapsed on the track.

At the hospital, Archie was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma. "It was the first time I ever saw my dad cry," Archie said.

"I was just in a state of shock," Archie's mom, Georgia Collins-Dorsey, said. "I just thought, 'Oh my God, my baby is fixing to die.'"





St. Jude patient Archie, pictured at St. Jude in August 2012.

As Archie sat in the back of the ambulance on his way to St. Jude, his eyes were wide with curiosity despite the late hour and his fear. The young EMT, a kind lady with a warm smile, patiently answered his endless questions. “What’s this? What’s that?” he asked, pointing to various pieces of medical equipment. She explained each one with care.

At St. Jude, his nurse took her time with him, her voice calm and reassuring. She explained the IV and the catheter, detailing what each did and how it would help, all while working with brisk efficiency.

Immediately Archie found himself in treatment for his lymphoma.

“The chemo made you feel terrible, terrible, terrible,” Archie said, but he found solace in talking with his doctors about how the treatment worked in his body. “They explained everything to me: pH balances, white blood cells, T blood cells.”

He realized he was the kind of kid who liked knowing medical things.

Whenever he was having trouble eating, Archie could get the cafeteria to make and deliver whatever he was craving right to his room. “Just seeing the paintings on the wall, the different children, the pictures, the story of St. Jude, I thought, ‘What kind of hospital is this?’ It’s like a little heaven,” he recalled.



At the lowest time in my life, I found the best moments at St. Jude.

– Archie, St. Jude cancer survivor

All Together

Archie had known he might lose his hair, but for the first two months of chemotherapy, it didn’t fall out. So, maybe it never would.

But one night Archie went to bed at St. Jude and woke up with clumps of hair all over his pillow. Most of his hair had fallen out overnight. He called out for his dad.

Staying at St. Jude had brought Archie and his dad closer. They exercised together every day to keep Archie strong. They prayed together, too.

Now, Archie wept as his dad gently shaved off Archie’s remaining hair. Then, in a show of solidarity, his dad shaved all his own hair off.

Not long after, the firefighters from his dad’s station came to visit. They had all shaved their heads, too. “Half of them were already bald,” Archie joked, “so they weren’t really losing anything.”

From that visit, Archie realized being a firefighter was like being part of a family.

Hero

After nearly half a year, Archie celebrated his No More Chemo party.

“At the lowest time in my life, I found the best moments at St. Jude,” he said.

Archie is married now. He and his wife just bought their first home. He’s living his dream of helping others as a firefighter and EMT, a dream that took shape at St. Jude.

He aspires to be as compassionate as the St. Jude nurses, who were “as sweet as can be possible.”

“Even if someone calls us at three in the morning about toe pain, I’m still nice because I think of those nurses,” Archie said.

And when there are fires, he fights them.

“St. Jude is my hero,” Archie said. “I want to be someone else’s hero.”



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St. Jude patient **Valentina**, pictured with her mom



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From Patient to Caregiver

After St. Jude helped her survive leukemia, Tori returned to work at the hospital to support other children undergoing treatment.

By **Ruma Kumar** - ALSAC

St. Jude cancer survivor and child life specialist Tori Hinton (right) works with St. Jude patient Nora Kay during appointments in January 2025 at St. Jude.

Tori Hinton's earliest childhood memories include busy days with family and sports in a small Louisiana town. With an older brother and a dad as a coach, Tori's free time was athletic: softball, basketball, soccer – you name it, she played it.

But that all changed the year she turned 11.

During softball season, she felt a profound weakness that just wouldn't lift.

Her pediatrician treated her for a sinus infection, then strep throat, but the fatigue lingered.

"I was out of school for about a month ... and I still wasn't getting better," Tori said. "My mom just had an intuition that something was really wrong with me."

More blood tests revealed what her mother had feared. Tori did have something more serious. It was cancer. Hometown doctors referred the family to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®.

Tori's parents called their older son home from college and gathered the siblings in their bedroom to tell them of a word Tori had never heard: leukemia. A type of cancer in the blood and bone marrow, her parents said.

Cancer was a word she did know, and what she knew frightened her. Processing her diagnosis with quick apprehension, she turned to her father and asked, "Am I going to die?"

"My dad just told me, he didn't know," Tori recalled. "But we were going to St. Jude and going to do everything we could not to let that happen."

They didn't have time to waste. Doctors at St. Jude were expecting her. That evening, Tori went to the softball field to say goodbye to her friends and then loaded into the car with her mother for the seven-hour drive to Memphis, Tennessee.

A persistent ache throbbed deep within Tori's lower back, leg bones and joints, so they stopped several times along the way. Her mother climbed into the backseat to massage a pain she couldn't reach, coaxed Tori into a restless slumber, then kept driving. They arrived on the St. Jude campus at 3 a.m.

"When we arrived, I remember walking through the front doors of what is now the patient care center, and I could see the sense of relief mostly on my mom's face," Tori said. "I think she was just happy to be here, happy to know that somebody had finally figured out what was going on with me and that we were going to get right to work."

And they did. Tori was taken up to the inpatient unit, where nurses started running tests immediately to confirm the diagnosis and doctors determined Tori's treatment plan. By the morning, St. Jude had confirmed Tori had acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL), and she was placed on a protocol involving several rounds of chemotherapy lasting two-and-a-half years.

Tori remembers the fatigue and the pain in the early weeks of treatment being the worst, a time when massages, heating pads and pain medications did little to provide relief.

But she also began to feel the heaviness of the emotional toll this was taking. She missed her friends. She missed her active life. The change from being a child who was

constantly playing sports to being in a bed, scanned and poked with needles, was difficult for her, Tori said. Some hometown friendships waned as she spent long stretches at St. Jude. The physical insecurity she felt when she began to lose her hair only worsened the social isolation she felt.

But she had family around her supporting her, encouraging her, Tori said. An aunt helped her use humor to get through hair loss. She made new friends at St. Jude, meeting up with other patients in common lobby spaces on inpatient floors to play card games and listen to music on a jukebox. And it was during this time, she also started thinking about how nice it would be to work in a place like St. Jude helping patients cope with treatment.

“

I was so appreciative of the care and the treatment that I got here. I knew that I wanted to give that to other people in life, and to make an impact on other people's lives in the future.

– **Tori Hinton**, St. Jude child life specialist and former patient

“It was not long into treatment that I was like, ‘I’m going to work here one day,’” Tori said. “I had no idea what I wanted to do. But I knew I was going to. I just always said that I’m going to go back to St. Jude to work.”

On her 14th birthday, she celebrated the end of her chemotherapy.

Tori finished high school and went on to college with no evidence of cancer throughout that time. But St. Jude stayed with her, bringing Tori back to the Memphis campus every few years through St. Jude LIFE, a cohort study which helps researchers track and learn about the long-term health of childhood cancer survivors. Doctors who followed her through St. Jude LIFE have educated Tori on the possible

side effects of her treatment – in her case, risk of heart disease and bone density concerns – and have told her how to monitor and manage those conditions. Information learned from St. Jude LIFE also helps St. Jude develop and refine treatments to reduce late effects, the treatment-related conditions that affect survivors.

While Tori was in college, she began taking courses in psychology still considering possible jobs at St. Jude. When on campus for a St. Jude LIFE study visit, she met with a child life specialist and decided that would be her career.

St. Jude understands the importance of treating the whole child, not just the disease. The



St. Jude patient Tori, pictured at St. Jude in June 2005.

Department of Psychosocial Services includes teams of best-in-class specialists in a range of areas: social work, transition oncology, psychology, spiritual care, education and child life. Nationally certified with backgrounds in human growth and development, education, psychology or counseling, child life specialists help children and teens cope with the challenges that come with being in the hospital and undergoing treatment.

As a childhood cancer survivor, Tori said she felt uniquely qualified to support patients who were facing a life-threatening disease, as she once had, and guiding them through the various aspects of treatments. Tori began working at St. Jude as a child life specialist in 2019.

In her work, Tori uses developmentally appropriate interventions to explain cancer, procedures and treatment to kids. These interventions include using teaching dolls with ports so patients can get comfortable with treatments, reading individualized books for patients about their specific diagnosis or surgeries and bringing medical equipment into play to get patients comfortable with hospital supplies they will experience often. Child life specialists also lead support



As a child life specialist, Tori Hinton (center) helps patients understand their treatment and remain comfortable during procedures. Here, she works with St. Jude patient Nora Kay during a blood draw in January 2025.



“
I always say to them, ‘I am really sorry that you have to be here ... but if you’re going to go through something like this in life, this is the place to be.’”

– Tori Hinton, St. Jude child life specialist and former patient

groups for patients. Through these various sorts of interventions, Tori said she tries to help kids understand what treatment entails and how to cope with difficult things like needles and scans.

“I appreciated when people were honest with me and let me be a part of my care and didn’t hide things from me,” Tori said.

“You might think, ‘Oh telling (kids) about cancer may be really scary or maybe we shouldn’t,’” she said. “But it’s really important that we’re just honest with them, because when we’re honest with them, we can really help them cope (and) set them up for success.”

Tori said she also helps ensure kids in treatment meet developmental

milestones and engage in the activities they enjoy despite the weakness and limitations that come with being in treatment.

When she first meets families, they’re honest and vulnerable with her, she said. They tell her they wished they hadn’t needed to come to St. Jude.

“I always say to them, I am really sorry that you have to be here ... but if you’re going to go through something like this in life, this is the place to be,” Tori said.

She tells them this because every day that she and gets to work at her “dream job,” she is living proof of how St. Jude helps so many children not only survive their cancer but thrive afterward.

“I was so appreciative of the care and the treatment that I got here,” Tori said. “I knew that I wanted to give that to other people in life, and to make an impact on other people’s lives in the future.”



Your gift helps St. Jude cancer survivors like Tori live to help others. Make life your legacy.
stjude.org/ImpactGiving

A novel approach to legacy giving

By **Bethany Horton** - ALSAC

Raised in New York City, Sandra Kitt found beauty and inspiration up each avenue and across every numbered street. When her second-grade teacher mentioned her aptitude for words and art, her parents were quick to clear the path so she could explore her talents.

They hadn't always had easy lives, and they were determined to raise their children to embrace dreams with both arms. They enrolled Sandra in a children's art program at the Museum of Modern Art, opening a world of possibilities that would shape the woman she would become.

"The classes at the museum were pivotal for me. They opened up my worldview, and I began to see that the world was much bigger than my neighborhood, my community, and I wanted to see all of it," Sandra said. "I began to be fearless about exploring beyond the boundaries of my community."

Decades later, Sandra was an established and respected novelist

who wrote stories focused on the beauty and complexities of families and relationships. Her work and life were centered around human connection, and she always sought ways to give back. When a group of volunteers for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® asked her to support their fundraising efforts within her vast network, Sandra enthusiastically agreed.

"I always want to give back. When I think of giving back, for me, it's also recognizing the need to show gratitude for what I have, for where I've arrived and where I've come in my own life," Sandra said. "And in a bigger sense, I feel like the proof of a good civilization is that they find ways of helping people who can't help themselves."

Sandra gave her resources, time and talents as a St. Jude donor and volunteer, and she found herself falling further in love with the mission and families she encountered. She saw each St. Jude child as a main character – a hero. "These children demonstrate an enormous amount of bravery. They put so much trust in the hands of their parents, their guardians, the doctors and the staff," she said. "I want them to know that their

futures can be very, very bright. All kinds of possibilities are there for them if they're given a chance and an opportunity to realize that."

As Sandra continued to volunteer, write, teach, mentor and travel, her philanthropic focus began to narrow on the mission of St. Jude. "I give monthly and give larger amounts as requested during the year. I spoke with my attorney and my financial planner to make sure that St. Jude is reflected in my estate plans, too," she said. And though she knew this was all important and made a difference, she couldn't help but ask

herself what she was uniquely suited to offer the families of St. Jude.

As creativity is known to arrive, an idea struck her like a bolt of lightning. She would write her next book about a family navigating pediatric illness and donate to the place that inspired it. "I arranged to give to St. Jude from the book royalties, and the publishing house was inspired to make an individual contribution as well," she said.

Sandra's book was a hit, but she doesn't plan on stopping there. "My days are typically not 24 hours.

They're like 25 or 26," she joked. "So, I don't mind taking on more responsibility – trying to come up with more creative ways to use who I am, what I know and what I can do to help St. Jude."

"There are always ways that we can help. There are always things that matter that we can contribute

“

I don't mind taking on more responsibility — trying to come up with more creative ways to use who I am, what I know and what I can do to help St. Jude.

– Sandra Kitt, St. Jude donor

as individuals, as human beings," Sandra said. "I feel comfortable that my resources are going to something that I absolutely believe in. I'm actively trying to be part of the big and small solutions by doing what I can to help St. Jude families and children, wherever they are in their diagnosis and treatments."



Join Sandra in making St. Jude part of your legacy. Choose the planned giving option that is right for you, and your generosity will help children with cancer and other life-threatening diseases. stjude.org/ImpactGiving

Atomic focus

St. Jude structural biology department focuses on understanding the molecular breakdowns that lead to disease.

By **Linda A. Moore** - ALSAC

When Charalampos Babis Kalodimos, PhD, moved his family to the United States about 20 years ago, a move to Memphis, Tennessee, wasn't in their plan.

Kalodimos was born and raised in Greece and earned degrees in Greece and France before accepting a postdoctoral fellowship in the Netherlands. He came to the U.S. to be a university professor, first at Rutgers University and next at the University of Minnesota Medical School.

Since 2017, Kalodimos has been the chair of the Department of Structural Biology at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® in Memphis.

He fell hard for the St. Jude mission.

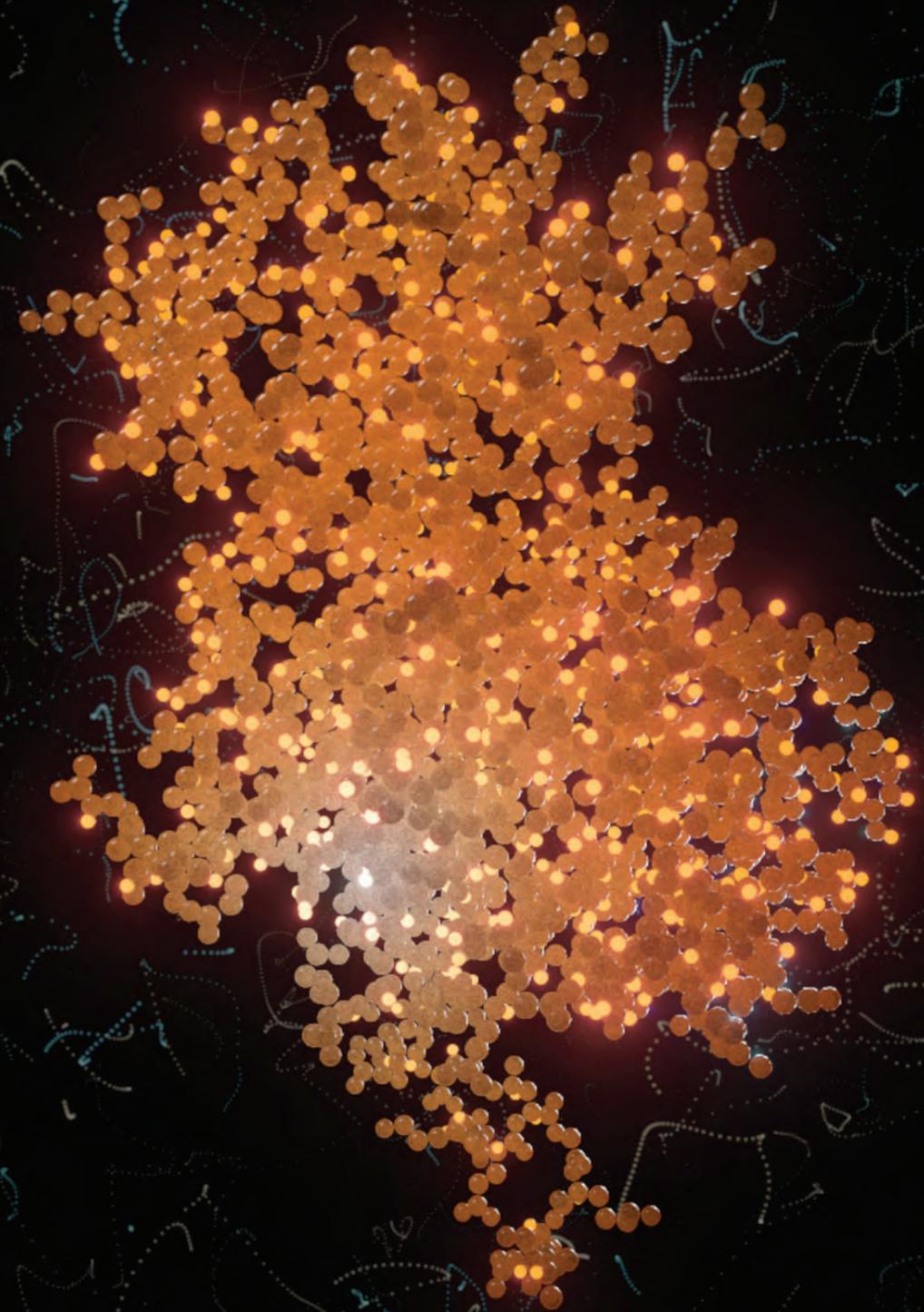
The Department of Structural Biology at St. Jude is working to understand life and disease at the atomic level.

"Structural biology is a collection of technologies that allows us to visualize in exquisite detail the three-dimensional structure of biomolecules, their shape, such as proteins, for example, protein

machineries – inside the cell," Kalodimos said.

By understanding the components that regulate the function of important biomolecules through the use of sophisticated techniques, researchers are able to gain a clear picture of how molecules look when they function inside a cell.

It's that information, gained through the deepest of dives inside cells, that allows scientists to understand how a malfunction at the innermost level of a single cell can result in disease. The ability to detect these kinds of vulnerabilities



A Nuclear Magnetic Resonance spectroscopic image shows a protein kinase rendered in a way to highlight the dynamic features, allowing scientists to gain information from deep inside cells.

within cells allows doctors and researchers to understand better why the disease developed and to intervene with drugs and other therapeutics, Kalodimos said.

“And this information enables our scientists to integrate different approaches so we can tackle problems that are very, very challenging,” Kalodimos said.

St. Jude provides researchers with the tools, technologies and necessary resources to address these complex challenges while working toward the common mission to advance cures for pediatric cancer and other life-threatening pediatric diseases.

In 2019, the Structural Biology Department acquired a Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) spectrometer, which at that time was the most powerful superconducting magnet in the world.

“It is very similar to the MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) most people are familiar with, only we

use much, much stronger magnets,” Kalodimos said.

Kalodimos’ team collaborates with scientists in other St. Jude departments so that the benefits of biomolecular NMR spectroscopy support research progress across campus.

“When we open up and welcome the entire community to collaborate, we gain access to a diverse range of biological systems. This, in turn, expands our repertoire, allowing us to explore more biological questions

and leverage these tools more effectively,” he said.

This absence of barriers between departments is important.

Right now, NMR spectroscopy is at the center of an interdisciplinary project by the Department of Structural Biology. This new blue-sky initiative, “Seeing the Invisible in Protein Kinase,” will utilize NMR spectroscopy to detect and characterize rare structural states in protein kinases.



This information enables our scientists to integrate different approaches so we can tackle problems that are very, very challenging.

– Charalampos Babis Kalodimos,
Chair, Structural Biology Department at St. Jude



Protein kinases are enzymes in the human body that are involved in important biological functions, like cell growth. When protein kinases do not function normally and cell growth is uncontrollable, it can lead to cancer, Kalodimos said.

The main goal of the blue-sky initiative is to understand kinases and to use what is learned to develop new selective drugs, he said.

“We would like to massively increase the number of kinases that we can target and design new drugs (for),” he said.

It’s the kind of work that can be done only at St. Jude.

When Kalodimos was contacted by St. Jude officials about his current job, he agreed to visit the campus, but didn’t expect to accept the position. After meeting future colleagues and patients at St. Jude, one visit turned out to be enough.

When he joined St. Jude, there were about 30 people working in the Department of Structural Biology. Today, the department has about 250 people.

During his first visit to campus, Kalodimos was impressed by the resources made possible by the support of St. Jude donors as well as the spirit of collaboration between medical doctors and scientists. Those are the same things that have allowed him to attract and keep talent from around the globe.

And although resources help, he said, what locks it in for everyone they’ve brought in is the mission to advance cures and the means to prevent pediatric cancer and other catastrophic diseases.

At St. Jude, researchers see how their discoveries can translate to help actual patients.

“What seals the deal is their understanding that if they join St. Jude, now they’ll become part of a large team with a common mission,” he said. “That’s very important.”



Your gift helps researchers like Dr. Kalodimos continue their lifesaving work. stjude.org/ImpactGiving

Magnetic Power

St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital® is home to one of the most powerful superconducting magnets in the world – part of a toolkit of resources that helps researchers see farther into cells than ever before.

When the 1.1 GHz Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR) spectrometer was installed in 2019, it was the largest and most powerful device of its kind. It allows St. Jude researchers to study proteins, DNA, RNA and other biomolecules to better understand cancer and other catastrophic diseases that affect children.

The goal is to advance the research done at St. Jude and translate that research into cures. Having the right tool, the power and the resolution that the NMR provides lets scientists at St. Jude do research that had been impossible.

The NMR is used by the Department of Structural Biology at St. Jude to investigate important biological systems with the goal of understanding health and disease at the molecular and atomic level. It is the centerpiece of the department, which is led by Charalampos Babis Kalodimos, PhD, department chair.

James R. Downing, MD, St. Jude president and CEO, said the NMR was an important enhancement within the Structural Biology Department.

“In our fight against pediatric cancer and other catastrophic childhood diseases, it is imperative that we learn as much as possible about the basic relationships within cells and how those relationships affect the growth and also treatment of disease,” Downing said.

“Investments in state-of-the-art technology like this NMR spectrometer allow us to make scientific progress faster. Not only will we be able to use NMR technology to identify proteins that may be the root cause of cancer, but we can also see how those proteins are affected by our treatments. This could lead to major breakthroughs in our understanding of disease pathogenesis and therapeutic responses.”



REELING IN HOPE

Rylee is excited for all the little things in life.

By **Kelly Cox** - ALSAC

Miles is a professional angler who has caught tens of thousands of fish in his career. He has won tournaments. He has hosted a show. He has guided clients on excursions in Alaska, where he assists in landing halibut that may weigh 250 pounds. He knows about patience and disappointment, and he knows about rough waters – professionally.

When his cellphone rang that day in January 2024, he was on the water in Florida, practicing for a fishing event. In an instant, he had never been more adrift.

He and his wife Katie's only child, a baby named Rylee, had just been diagnosed with cancer.

"I remember just falling to my knees on my boat and breaking down," he said.

Even though he was out of state, the call had come to Miles first because Rylee's pediatrician, who had just received the scan results, knew Katie was on the highway, driving Rylee to an appointment hours away from home.

From hundreds of miles away, Miles quickly marshalled friends to meet Katie in the parking lot when she arrived, so she would have support when he called her with the terrible news.

Neuroblastoma.

"It's a very scary form of cancer," Katie knows now.

'What is the next step?'

Neuroblastoma, a cancer that develops most often in the adrenal gland nerve tissue, is usually found in children less than 5 years old and can sometimes spread to multiple areas of the body. Depending on the spread of the cancer and the risk group, it may require years of treatment.

Looking back on receiving the diagnosis, Miles said, "It's a jumble of mostly fear, and a little bit of anger, to be honest. You're angry, resentful that this is happening. You just kind of ride the wave. But, you know, you also get into problem-solving mode. What is the next step? What have we got to do to get this figured out?"

To Miles, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® seemed like the answer.



Katie and Miles, now in the calm after the storm, are able to reflect on how this has re-charted their course.

There is a renewed focus on time at home, simplicity, enjoying nature. On slowing down and taking nothing for granted.

“After you come out the other side,” Katie said, “it’s a very sweet perspective to have about getting a second chance.”

“I’ve always been a very driven, goal-oriented person, which I still am,” Miles said. “But I also see the other side of that. My perspective has been the biggest thing that has changed. As soon as we ended up getting home, all the stuff that you build up in your life that you think is going to make you happy, we just started getting rid of it. Because the less stuff you have, the more you can focus on what really matters.”

His hopes and dreams for Rylee haven’t changed, exactly, but his expectations have shifted. Possible future accomplishments carry less weight. “After something like this happens, all you want is a happy, healthy child, because all the other stuff doesn’t matter. It really doesn’t anymore.”

When Rylee is old enough to hold a fishing pole, which Miles guesstimates may be about two years from now, he does have this expectation: that the two of them will be out in the sunshine catching some bluegill together.

Rylee was referred to St. Jude where she underwent genetic testing that helped inform her course of treatment. “The research plays a huge role in how efficient her treatments were and how targeted they were,” Katie said. “So, we’re not over-treating, and we’re not under-treating, because relapsing is a big deal for childhood cancer.”

Rylee’s treatment included chemotherapy and surgery to remove the mass from around her right kidney. In fearful moments, Katie had envisioned a sick little baby in a hospital bed, unable to play, unable to meet milestones. These fears went unrealized. “Here they offer so many things,” she said. “There’s music classes, there’s school if your child is old enough to go to school.” Through physical and occupational therapies, Rylee learned to pull up, to stand and to walk.

First-time parents Miles and Katie had imagined they would need to be their baby’s rock. Instead, in her persistent and against-the-odds joy, she was theirs.

“She’s kind of known as being Smiley Rylee,” Katie said. “I’m just so proud of her, and I’m so proud of all of us. I just can’t believe that I had a part in creating such a happy little human that really teaches you how to live in the moment and can just let life happen and be excited for all the little things.”

A second chance

The day Rylee received her last IV chemo treatment, her parents posted a video on social media announcing the good news. “I personally wanted to get through this video without crying – I can’t do it!” said Miles. “Happy tears ... We will be spreading the word about St. Jude for the rest of our lives.”

Rylee was just 10 months old when she arrived at St. Jude with a cancer diagnosis. Today, she’s a walking, talking toddler who loves books and animals, especially her dog, a corgi called Doppler. And most importantly, her scans show no evidence of cancer. She remains on oral chemotherapy as maintenance therapy to reduce the risk of a relapse, which she takes at home.



Your support gives patients like Rylee the chance to spend more days fishing with dad.
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Meet the Artist: *Abraham*

Abraham likes getting outside for fishing with dad or basketball with his sister, but when it's rainy or cold, he always has a backup plan to pass the time: making art. Abraham is a middle-schooler now, but even at the age of 3, he was into arts and crafts. To his mom's delight – and his – St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® offered a lot of opportunities for him to engage in these activities while receiving cancer treatment.

His journey to St. Jude began in February 2018, when suddenly his right eye turned inward. A CT scan showed a large tumor in his brain. Following an emergency surgery at a hospital close to home, his parents learned their son had a type of brain cancer called medulloblastoma.

Abraham was referred to St. Jude because he met the criteria for SJMB12, a clinical trial that based treatment on clinical risk and the tumor's molecular traits.

Abraham's view of St. Jude includes various Memphis, Tennessee, landmarks that he enjoys seeing when he visits, like the bridge over the Mississippi River. He started by making a pencil sketch, and he then painted over that to create a colorful piece. He hopes people can tell by looking at it how much time this artwork took him to complete!

Abraham has completed treatment but continues to visit St. Jude for checkups.



St. Jude **walk**



At St. Jude Children's Research Hospital®, every breakthrough is part of a journey to progress. Small steps, when combined, lead to significant results – more discoveries, more cures, more lives saved. By joining the St. Jude Walk, you contribute to this vital progress for our lifesaving mission. Here, every stride you take brings us closer to finding cures, and **every step helps save lives.**

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Carlos' Joy

Carlos started to limp on his left leg in April 2024. At the same time, his father had undergone knee surgery, so his parents thought the 2-year-old was imitating his dad. But as days and weeks passed, his limping worsened.

His parents reached out to Carlos' pediatrician, and after several tests, Carlos was diagnosed with medulloblastoma, a brain tumor. Carlos underwent surgery in Mexico, his homeland, and then was referred to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital® in Memphis, Tennessee, in June 2024.

"We were very impressed by the attention of the nurses and doctors (at St. Jude)," his mom, Nathaly, said. "At first, Carlitos was very fearful and very nervous. Now, he is very calm and talks to the nurses, greets them and hugs them."

Carlos celebrated his 3rd birthday in the fall of 2024. His mom said he is a very happy child and enjoys singing, dancing and playing with his toy cars and dinosaur figures. He completed his treatment in early 2025, returned home and will continue to return to St. Jude for monitoring.



You help bring hope and healing to patients like Carlos when you support St. Jude. Did you know many ways to give with non-cash assets – like stocks and IRAs – may present unique opportunities to save on taxes while furthering the St. Jude mission? Donate today at stjude.org/ImpactGiving